

# Washington's Presidency

## One American's Story

Charles Thomson had served as secretary of the Continental Congress in 1774. Now, on April 14, 1789, he came to Mount Vernon in Virginia with a letter for George Washington. Washington knew the reason for the visit. Thomson's letter was to tell him that he had been elected the nation's first president. Before giving Washington the letter, Thomson made a short speech.

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“I have now Sir to inform you that . . . your patriotism and your readiness to sacrifice . . . private enjoyments to preserve the happiness of your Country [convinced the Congress that you would accept] this great and important Office to which you are called not only by the unanimous votes of the Electors but by the voice of America.”

—Charles Thomson, quoted in *George Washington's Papers, at the Library of Congress 1741–1799*

Washington accepted the honor and the burden of his new office. He would soon guide the nation through its early years.

## Washington's New Government

**KEY QUESTION** How did Washington's presidency shape new political traditions?

Under the new Constitution, the first presidential election was held in 1789. Washington won, and traveled to New York City, the nation's capital, to be **inaugurated**, or formally sworn in, as president. On April 30, 1789 at Federal Hall, the inauguration took place. The runner-up, John Adams of Massachusetts, became Washington's vice-president. As the nation's first president, Washington knew that his every action would set a **precedent**—an example that becomes standard practice. Under the first president, many political institutions and traditions were established.



George Washington—shown in a wax likeness—was a popular choice for first president of the new nation.

**Congressional Decisions** Washington took charge of a political system that was a bold experiment. No one knew if a government based on the will of the people could really work. The new government began to take shape in the summer of 1789. First, people argued over what to call Washington. Some suggested "His Excellency," but others argued that made the president sound as if he was a king. Finally, in keeping with the simplicity of a republic, Washington agreed to "Mr. President."

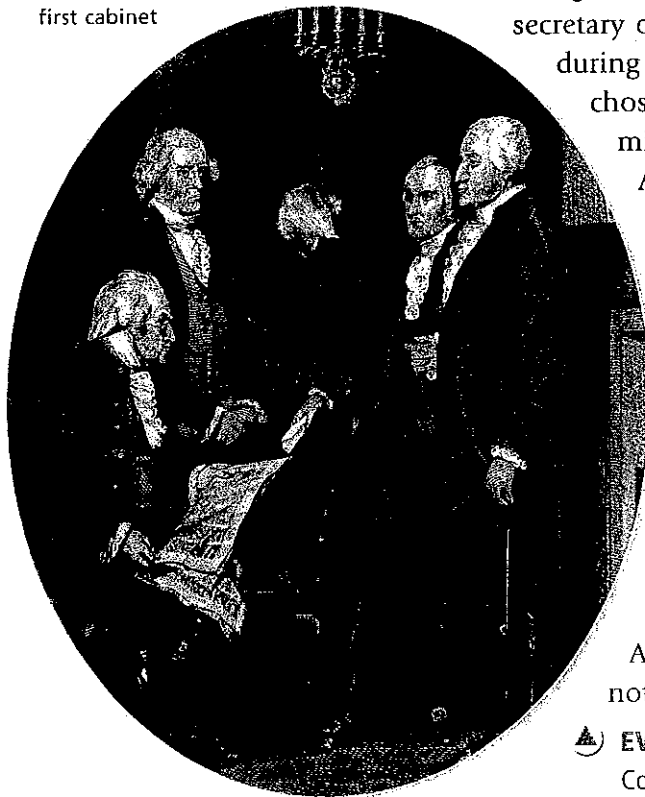
The writers of the Constitution had left many matters to be decided by Congress. For example, the Constitution created a Supreme Court but left it to Congress to decide on the details. What type of additional courts should there be and how many? What would happen if federal court decisions conflicted with state laws?

To help answer these questions, Congress passed a federal court system under the **Federal Judiciary** (joo•DISH•ee•AIR•ee) Act of 1789. This act gave the Supreme Court six members: a chief justice, or judge, and five associate justices. Over time, that number has grown to nine. The law also provided for less powerful federal courts. Washington appointed **John Jay**, the prominent lawyer and diplomat, as the first chief justice of the Supreme Court.

**Assembling a Cabinet** The Constitution also gave Congress the task of creating departments to help the president lead the nation. The president had the power to appoint the heads of these departments.

Congress created the departments: state, war, treasury, justice and postal service. The State Department dealt with relations with other countries. The War Department was in charge of the nation's defense. The Treasury Department was in charge of the nation's economy, or financial security.

George Washington's  
first cabinet



Washington chose talented people to run the departments. For secretary of war, he picked Henry Knox, a trusted general during the Revolution. For secretary of state, Washington chose Thomas Jefferson. He had been serving as U.S. minister to France. Washington chose the brilliant Alexander Hamilton to be secretary of the treasury. Hamilton was to manage the government's money. The secretary's ties to the president began during the war when he had served as one of Washington's aides. To advise the government on legal matters, Washington picked Edmund Randolph as **attorney general**.

These department heads and the attorney general made up Washington's **cabinet**. The Constitution made no mention of a cabinet, but Washington began the practice of calling his cabinet to advise him on official matters. Another high office, that of postmaster general, was not elevated to cabinet status until 1829.

▲ **EVALUATE** Explain how the decisions made by the first Congress created political traditions.

## The Nation's Finances

**KEY QUESTION** What financial problems faced the new nation?

Washington assigned his secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton, the task of straightening out the nation's finances. The most urgent money issue was the U.S. government's war debts.

**War Debts** During the Revolution, the United States had borrowed millions of dollars from France, Spain, and the Netherlands. The new nation was also in debt to private citizens, including soldiers who had received bonds—certificates that promised payment plus interest—as compensation for their services during the war. State governments also had wartime debts. By 1789, the national debt—foreign and domestic—totaled more than \$52 million.

Most government leaders agreed that the nation must pay its debts to win the respect of both foreign nations and its own citizens. Hamilton saw that the new nation must assure other countries that it was responsible about money. These nations would do business with the United States if they saw that the country would pay its debts.

**Hamilton's Political Views** Hamilton believed in a strong central government. He thought the power of the national government should be stronger than that of the state governments. Hamilton also believed that government should encourage business and industry and that the nation's prosperity depended on the support of the nation's wealthy merchants and manufacturers. The government owed money to many of these rich men. By paying them back, Hamilton hoped to win their support for the new government.

**Hamilton's Proposals** In 1790, Hamilton presented his plan to Congress. He proposed three steps to improve the nation's finances and to strengthen the national government: 1) paying off all war debts, 2) raising government revenues, and 3) creating a national bank.

Hamilton also wanted the federal government to pay off the war debts of the states. However, sectional differences arose over repayment of state debts. Many Southern states resisted because they had already gone further



## History Makers

### Alexander Hamilton 1755–1804

Hamilton was one of the giants of American history. In his early twenties, he was a personal aide to General George Washington during the American Revolution. In the 1780s, he was a signer of the U.S. Constitution. He was one of the authors of a set of essays called *The Federalist* papers that persuaded Americans to ratify the Constitution.

As the first secretary of the treasury, Hamilton helped ensure the economic health of the new republic. His actions helped support his belief in a strong government and helped establish the executive branch as the most powerful branch of the government.

### COMPARING Leaders

Compare Hamilton's leadership qualities to those of other American leaders mentioned in the chapter.

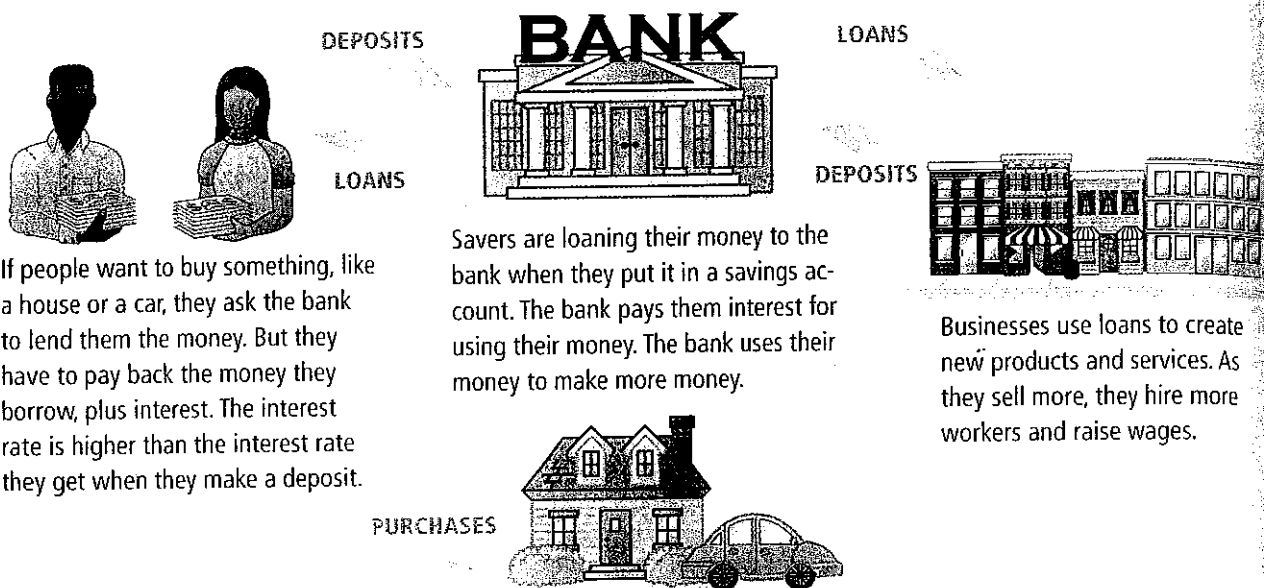


**ONLINE  
BIOGRAPHY**

For more on Alexander Hamilton, go to the Research & Writing Center @ [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com)

## HOW BANKS WORK

Hamilton believed that a national bank could help the economy of the new nation. It would be funded by a partnership between the federal government and wealthy private investors. In that way, private money would be tied to the country's welfare.



## CRITICAL THINKING

- Analyze Point of View** Do you think that the people who feared a strong central government supported Hamilton's idea of a national bank? Why or why not?
- Make Inferences** What are some ways that banks make money?

towards paying off their debts. Hamilton asked Thomas Jefferson of Virginia to help him gain Southern support. They reached a compromise by agreeing that the southern states would support Hamilton's plan and back payment of state debts. In return, northerners would support locating the capital in the South. The location chosen was on the banks of the Potomac River.

**Building a Strong Government** To raise revenue, the secretary of the treasury favored **tariffs**, which are taxes on imported goods. Tariffs serve two purposes: raising money for the government and encouraging the growth of national business. Americans bought goods from overseas in large quantities, including hemp, steel, and molasses. Tariffs on these goods kept a steady income flowing to the government. Since tariffs made foreign goods more expensive, they encouraged people to buy American goods.

Hamilton also called for the creation of a national bank. It would give the government a safe place to keep money. It would also make loans to businesses and government. Most important, it would issue bank notes—paper money that could be used as currency.

**Hamilton's Opponents** Overall, Hamilton's plan was to strengthen the national government. Opponents of a national bank, including Jefferson and Madison, claimed that the bank would encourage an unhealthy partnership between the government and wealthy business interests. This angered Jefferson in particular. Those against the bank also argued that, since the Constitution does not mention a national bank, the government cannot create a national bank. They believed in the narrow or "strict" interpretation of the Constitution.

These differences began the debate among those who favored a "strict" interpretation of the Constitution, one in which the federal government has very limited powers, and a "loose" interpretation, which favors greater federal powers. Jefferson favored a strict interpretation, and Hamilton favored a broad or loose interpretation of the Constitution.

Hamilton's group used the so-called "Elastic Clause" of the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8, Number 18) to argue their case. This clause gives Congress the authority to do whatever is "necessary and proper" to carry out its specific powers, such as regulating commerce.

Washington backed Hamilton, and the Bank of the United States was established in 1791. Washington mostly tried to remain above the conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson and to encourage them to work together despite their basic differences. However, the formation of the two political factions, based on Hamilton's and Jefferson's opposing philosophies, laid the foundation for the American political factions that followed.

**CATEGORIZE** List Hamilton's solutions for the nation's finances.

## Section Assessment



### ONLINE QUIZ

For test practice, go to  
Interactive Review @ ClassZone.com

### TERMS & NAMES

- Explain the importance of
  - Federal Judiciary Act
  - John Jay
  - attorney general
  - cabinet

### USING YOUR READING NOTES

- Categorize** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of the section.

Cabinet Member	Responsibilities
Hamilton	managed the nation's money
Jefferson	oversaw foreign relations

### KEY IDEAS

- What was the purpose of Washington's cabinet?
- What were the three steps proposed by Hamilton for helping the nation's finances?

### CRITICAL THINKING

- Compare and Contrast** How did Hamilton and Jefferson differ in their interpretation of the Constitution?
- Make Inferences** Why might merchants and manufacturers support a strong central government?
- Connect to Today** What organizational decisions made by the first Congress are still in effect today?
- Writing Letter** Imagine it's the 1790s. Write a letter to the editor that either supports or opposes Hamilton's plan for a national bank.



## NEW STYLES FOR A NEW NATION

The decade of the 1790s is often called the Federal period in the arts. During this time, Americans created art that expressed the attitudes, ideals, and hopes of their new nation.

### A REVOLUTION IN FASHION

Clothing styles reflected the revolutionary political changes underway in America and France. Here, the old-style couple on the right is startled by the new fashions of youth. The ornate clothing and wigs of the aristocracy were on their way out, and a more relaxed, plainer style was on its way in.



### ACHIEVEMENTS IN ART

Charles Willson Peale was America's greatest artist at this time. His work captured the informality and good humor of American culture. This painting of Peale's sons fooled even George Washington into thinking the stairs were real.



### THE MODEL OF LIBERTY

The goddess of Liberty, who appeared on U.S. coins in 1795, was modeled on a famous woman of the Federal period—Anne Willing Bingham. Brilliant and highly educated, Bingham was a friend of Thomas Jefferson. Her world-famous intelligence, independent spirit, and beauty made her the perfect choice to represent liberty on America's new coins.



## ABOLISHING SLAVERY

Many Americans in the early republic wanted to make America a place where "All men are created equal." Throughout the 1780s and '90s the Northern states slowly began abolishing slavery. The image shown here became an important symbol for the antislavery movement in America.



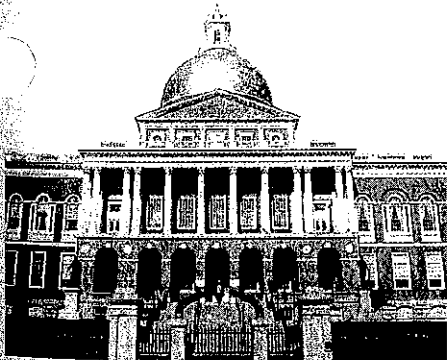
## BACK TO THE FUTURE

Americans saw a link between their new republic and the ancient republic of Rome. Like the Romans, Americans had rebelled against a king and established a democracy. Architects began designing buildings for their new government using Roman forms to represent the nation's ideals of democracy and justice.

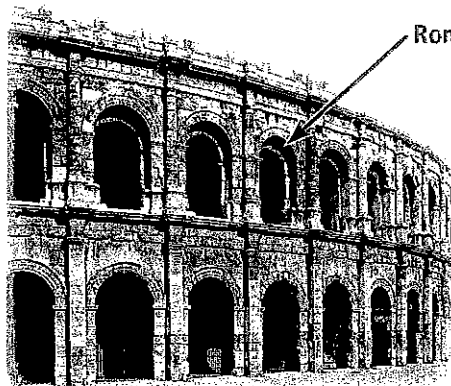
## Activity

### Reveal the Romans!

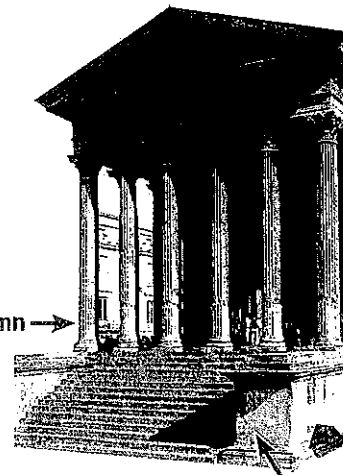
Study the architectural forms below. Then identify Roman elements that you find in the American buildings on the left. (Some buildings might combine several Roman forms.)



Massachusetts State House 1797



Roman arches

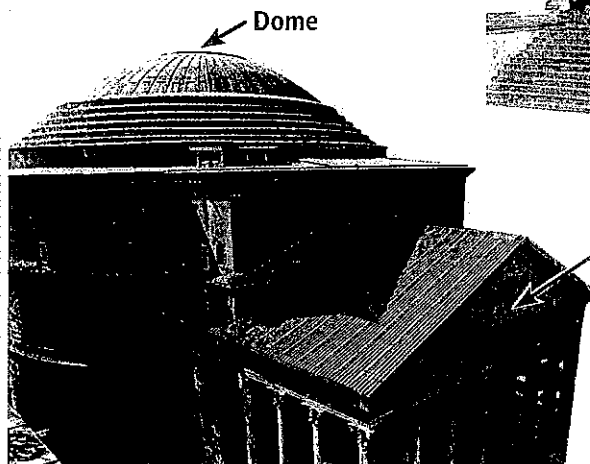


Column

Podium



Virginia State Capitol 1789



Dome

Pediment

Now look for pictures of other state capitols and identify the Roman forms you see.

# 1

SECTION

## READING STUDY GUIDE

**Washington's Presidency**

• **Before, You Learned** A new Constitution, approved in 1788, serves as a guide to the new republican government.

• **Now You Will Learn** George Washington and his advisers faced many challenges during his Presidency.

**AS YOU READ** Take notes categorizing information in this section. Use the graphic organizer on both pages of this worksheet.

Cabinet Member	Responsibilities
Alexander Hamilton	1.
2.	Secretary of State—oversees relations with foreign countries
Henry Knox	3.
Edmund Randolph	4.



Chapter 9, SECTION 1: WASHINGTON'S PRESIDENCY, *CONTINUED*

Alexander Hamilton's Plan	Goals of the Plan
pay off all war debt	5.
6.	impose tariffs on imported goods and encourage Americans to produce more goods
7.	create a place for government to keep money, to loan money to businesses and government, and to print money to be used as currency
argue for "loose" interpretation of the Constitution	8.

**MARK IT UP!** Circle each term where it appears in your notes and be sure you understand its meaning. If a term does not appear, write it outside the box where it *best* belongs.

Federal Judiciary  
John Jay  
attorney general

cabinet

**SKILLBUILDER****Primary Source Quotation**

"I have now Sir to inform you that ... your patriotism and your readiness to sacrifice ... private enjoyments to preserve the happiness of your Country [convinced Congress to accept] this great and important Office to which you are called not only by unanimous votes of the Electors but by the voice of America."

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9. **MARK IT UP!** Circle the word that tells how many electors voted for Washington.

10. **MARK IT UP!** Underline the reasons why the electors voted for Washington.

11. What phrase tells Washington that he now represents the people of the United States?

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